

Guardian Angels and Angelic National Patrons in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity

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The belief in “guardian angels,” i.e., the idea that an angel or other type of lesser deity is assigned to an individual human to protect, guide and intercede on his or her behalf with greater deities or the Deity, enjoyed a long history in the ancient Near East and is attested in Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian and Hellenistic contexts. In ancient Israel or, at least in the Hebrew Bible, we encounter only a few hints, at best, for such a belief. This concept, as all forms of angelology, appears to have undergone something of a renaissance in the Judaism of the second temple period. Still, nonetheless, it is not widely attested in the various witnesses to second temple Judaism which have come down to us. Belief in individual guardian angels is present in Christianity from, at least, the Gospel of Matthew and by the time of the early Fathers and the Rabbis had become a staple of angelology in both Christianity and Judaism. On the other hand, the related concept that certain angels served as guardians or patrons of peoples or nations played a much greater role in the angelology of second temple Judaism. The roots of this idea are to be found in the Hebrew Bible, and it continues on into early Christianity and rabbinic Judaism.

In this brief overview, we can do no more than trace this dual evolution from its origins in the ancient Near East and Hellenistic cultures through ancient Israel to the Judaism of the turn of the eras and on into early Christianity and rabbinic Judaism. We will give particular attention to the two concepts in Jewish texts and traditions from the second temple period, and just after. A brief summary of Early Christian and rabbinic Jewish texts and traditions will conclude this essay.

1. Guardian Angels in the ancient *Umwelt*

1.1 Ancient Near East

In Mesopotamia, as early as the third millennium, but becoming more prominent in the second, there existed a widespread belief in personal gods and goddesses. In the words of one eminent researcher, “the personal god was, *ab ovo*, intimately connected and concerned with one’s individual fortunes.”¹ One’s personal deity was, it would appear, always known. Any of the gods or goddesses, even the high cosmic powers such as Sîn, the god of the moon, Shamash, the sun god, and Nergal, the god of the underworld, could be identified with an individual’s personal god, even if most often the role was filled by lesser deities. In some sense, the individual’s deity dwelt within his or her physical body and if the personal god or goddess removed themselves, the individual would be open to the demons which cause disease. One’s personal deity was also in some sense one’s father or mother, who served as one’s provider and protector, who intercede for one before the higher gods and to whom one owed honour and obedience.²

1.2 The Hellenistic World

In ancient Greek mythology, as recorded by Hesiod, when the first race of men, those of the golden age, died, they became “pure spirits (*δαίμονες ἄγνοι*) dwelling on the earth.” These spirits “are kindly, delivering from harm,” and serve as “guardians of mortal men (*φύλακες θηντῶν ἀνθρώπων*); for they roam everywhere over the earth, clothed in mist and keep watch on judgements and cruel deeds, [they are] givers of wealth; for this royal right also they received” (Hesiod, *Works and Days* 122-126). Although there is no consistent view of the *daimones* in ancient Greek literature, demons or *daimones* are invariably held to rank between gods and mortals and very often function as intermediaries between the gods and humanity.³ And they are not infrequently viewed as guardians either of nations and peoples or of individuals.

1 Jacobsen, *Treasures* 155.

2 See the helpful summary in Jacobsen, *Treasures* 147-164, esp. 155-160.

3 Cf. the discussion in Burke, *Greek Religion* 179-181.

Both of the latter positions can be found in Plato: *daimones* as protective deities set over nations (Politikos 271de; 274b; Timaeus 42de; Leges 713c-714b); as protectors of individuals (Phaedon 107d-108c; 113d; Res publica 617de; 620de; Leges 732c; 877a). This view of the *daimones* as guardians of individuals and nations passed into later Platonism including, as we shall see in a moment, the thought of Philo of Alexandria.

2. The Hebrew Bible

2.1 Guardian angels of Individuals

In the Hebrew Bible we encounter from time to time the general idea that angels in general (Ps. 91:11-12) or even the Angel of the LORD (Ps. 34:7) serve as defenders and protectors of humankind. Nonetheless, the idea that individual angels are assigned to individual humans as their guardians and protectors is rare – if ever attested. The one place where it just might be found is the Book of Job. A heavenly intercessor is alluded to by two of Job's interlocutors, Eliphaz the Temanite in 5:1 and by Elihu in 33:23-26. Job himself three times appeals to such a heavenly intercessor (9:33; 16:19-21; 19:25). Interestingly, Job twice affirms his belief in such a being (16:19-21; 19:25) and once expresses doubt (9:33).⁴ His skepticism on this last instance, however, is in reality a rejection of the idea that any heavenly being could possess the authority to actually serve as an "umpire" between God and humanity; an intercessor as in 16:19-21 or 33:23-26 could be accepted, an umpire is out of the question. Of all these texts from the Book of Job, it is behind 9:33 that Mesopotamian ideas concerning personal gods are the most probable. In the words of one commentator

In ancient Sumerian theology each man had a personal god who acted as his advocate in the council of the gods who were too busy to give much attention to individual cases. This idea may be in the background of Job's thought, but he rejects it as unreal or unsatisfactory.⁵

This is not to say that Mesopotamian theology does not stand behind the other passages as well. It is to say that when the heavenly interces-

4 The MT reads ... לֹא יִשְׁבְּעֵנִי מוֹכֵיחַ ("There is no umpire between us,..."), but some Hebrew Mss have instead לֹא יִשְׁבְּעֵנִי מוֹכֵיחַ לִי ("Would that there was an umpire between us,...") and this reading is presupposed by the LXX and the Peshitta. Both readings express doubt in the existence of an heavenly umpire.

5 Pope, Job 76.

sors had been downgraded from an “umpire” to a “mediator” they were more acceptable to Hebrew theology and the Mesopotamian thought, consequently, receded further into the background.

It needs to be said that it is certainly very possible, if not probable, that this ancient near eastern background once resided not only in the background of the Hebrew text but also on the surface. In other words, it is possible that a belief in guardian deities once played a much more significant role in ancient Israel than the Massoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible would lead one to believe. It is clear that belief in monotheism grew and developed, that Israelite religion was not monotheistic at its beginnings and that many passages in the Hebrew Bible presuppose belief in other (lesser?) deities (e.g., Pss 82; 89:1-9; Deut 32:8-9, 43; etc.). Robert Murray, following a suggestion of R. Serra’s and M. Dahood’s, has cogently argued that the Hebrew root עיר means “to protect,” that it in turn is related to the Aramaic עיר (Dan. 4:10, 14, 20), usually rendered “Watcher,” but should be understood as “Guardian,” and that in a number of places, and by a variety of means, such guardian deities have been concealed in the text of the Hebrew Bible.⁶ Murray suggests, for example, that “the blind and lame” (העורים והפסחים) of 2Sam 5:6 originally referred to “the guardians and protectors,” הערים (“the guardians”) being transformed by the addition of a *waw* into העורים (“the blind”) and פסח being pointed differently so as to remove the reference to “protectors” (cf. Isa 31:5). According to Murray, a similar slight of hand may have occurred at Isa 33:23; 63:9; Lam. 4:14; and Job 19:25-27. If Murray is right, and I think he has made a strong case, it nonetheless seems that as monotheistic convictions grew and became entrenched, belief in such guardian deities was at first rejected entirely, at least officially, and only later during the second temple period re-introduced in the form of guardian angels.

2.2 Guardians of the Nations

Before we turn to the evidence of second temple Judaism, the parallel phenomenon of angelic guardian or patrons of the nations demands our attention. While guardian deities of individuals may, or may not, have been concealed or otherwise removed from the text of the Hebrew

6 Murray, Origin.

Bible, there is no doubt concerning one instance concerning the heavenly guardians of the nations. In Deut 32:8-9, according to the Masoretic Text, when the Most High divided humankind into nations, "he fixed the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel" (למספר בני ישראל), but he kept Israel as his own inheritance. The LXX in the main agrees but asserts that the Most High divided the nations "according to the number of *the angels of God*" (κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων θεοῦ). It is now clear that the LXX translators must have had before them something like אל למספר בני אל ("according to the number of the sons of God") or למספר בני אלים ("according to the number of the sons of the gods"), for a manuscript from Qumran, 4QDeutⁱ, read one or the other – the fragment breaks off at the crucial point, just after the ל, so that we cannot be sure which. Moreover, one early papyrus of the LXX, 848 (c. 50 BC), agrees exactly with the former reading: "according to the number of *the sons of God*" (κατὰ ἀριθμὸν υἱῶν θεοῦ), while Targum Ps.-Jonathan also presupposes either אל בני אל or בני אלים. Something similar happens later in the same chapter at v.43, where both the LXX and another Qumran manuscript, 4QDeut^q, agree in a significantly longer text which calls on the sons, i.e., the angels, of God, so the LXX, or the simply the gods, so 4QDeut^q, to worship YHWH. It seems safe to conclude that the original text of the Song of Moses (Deut 32:1-43) affirmed a belief in heavenly guardians, whether lesser deities or angels, set over the nations as a kind of cosmic patron, although later editors sought to remove this.

The same idea, it would seem, is reflected elsewhere in the Book of Deuteronomy. In 29:25-26 Israel is warned not to worship and serve other gods, gods whom YHWH "had not allotted to" Israel. This implies that, had he so desired, YHWH *could* have allotted Israel to other, lesser deities as he had the gentile nations. In fact, earlier, at 4:19-20, this is explicitly stated: Israel is not to worship the host of heaven, the sun, moon and stars, for these "YHWH your God has allotted to all the peoples everywhere under heaven," but he has kept Israel has his own possession among the nations. Given the common assumption in the ancient world of the divinity of the heavenly bodies, it would appear that at least the author of Deuteronomy assumed that each of the nations had been assigned by YHWH, the only true God, an angel or

“god,” to guide and protect it. The worship of such was even, it is implied, allowed the gentile nations. Israel, however, belonged to YHWH as his special possession among the nations.⁷

3. Second Temple Judaism

3.1 Guardians of the Nations

These angelic national guardians become much more prominent in the Judaism of the second temple period. Already in the decades prior to the crisis precipitated by the reforms introduced by Antiochus Epiphanes,⁸ Jesus ben Sira includes in a passage mainly concerned with anthropology the observation that God “appointed a ruler for every nation, but Israel is the Lord’s own portion” (Sir. 17:17).⁹ This parallels exactly the original text of Deut 32:8-9. Interestingly, a couple of late Greek manuscripts, minuscules 70 and 248, make the reference at Sir. 17:17 more precise, adding at the beginning of this sentence the notice that “[f]or at the division of the nations of all the earth, he appointed a ruler...”¹⁰ This should be probably regarded as a later gloss, but necessarily a particularly late one. Obviously, the purpose of the gloss was to make clear the legend to which allusion is being made. We know from a number of late sources the outline of that legend: When the LORD descended to the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-19), he took with him the seventy angels who perpetually stood before him. And at the Tower, he divided humankind into seventy languages and nations, one for each of the seventy angels and then dispersed humankind over the face of the earth, having appointed one of the seventy angels as their guardian. The guardianship of Israel, however, he kept as his own responsibility. The last detail either takes place immediately at Babel or later at Sinai. This legend, which we will term the Angelic Patron Legend, appears in Targum Ps.-Jon. at Gen 11:7-8 and at Deut 32:8-9, in the Hebrew *Testament of Naphtali* 8:4-10:2, and in *Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer* 24, none of which

7 Cf. the interpretation of Mullen, Assembly 202-205.

8 The Wisdom of Ben Sira is usually dated to 190-175 BC. So, e.g., Schürer, History III.1.202; Hengel, Judaism 131; and Nickelsburg, Literature 64.

9 ἑκάστῳ ἔθηκεν κατέστησεν ἡγοῦμενον, καὶ μερὶς κυρίου Ἰσραὴλ ἐστίν.

10 Ἐν γὰρ μερισμῷ τῶν ἐθνῶν τῆς γῆς πασῆς, κτλ.

can claim to be earlier than medieval times. Nonetheless, it is plausible to suppose that the legend itself is much earlier. In fact, a case can be made that it was already presumed by the author of *Jubilees*.

Two different passages suggest this. First, in its retelling of the Tower of Babel story (*Jub.* 10:22-23), God took the angels with him when he descended to see the Tower, but no mention is made of the number of angels, nor of the seventy languages. Second, in the narrative concerning the granting of the covenant of circumcision to Abra-

ham (15:11-34), the author first reveals that the two highest orders of angels, the angels of the Presence and the angels of holiness, also share in the covenant of circumcision, for they are created circumcised (15:27), and then affirms the same doctrine found in the original text of Deut 32:8-9 and Sir. 17:17: –

But he [= YHWH] chose Israel to be his people. He sanctified them and gathered (them) from all mankind. For there were many nations and many peoples and all belong to him. He made spirits rule over all in order to lead them astray from following him. But over Israel he made no angel or spirit rule because he alone is their ruler. He will guard them and require them for himself from his angels, his spirits, and everyone, and all his powers so that he may guard them and bless them and so that they may be his and he theirs from now and forever (15:30b-32).¹¹

Here the detail that certain spirits – a regular term for angels in *Jubilees* – were set over the nations *in order to lead them astray* is a new development, and one which is never fully explained or justified in the text of *Jubilees*. Elsewhere in *Jubilees* it is demons, the unclean offspring of the fallen Watchers, who lead humanity astray (cf. 10:1-9). The assumption of the Angelic Patron Legend would, however, explain it: The nations are to be led astray from following God because of their sin at the Tower of Babel. It would seem that the author of *Jubilees* was familiar with this legend and it has impacted to some degree his telling of the story of Babel. He, nonetheless, moved the legend's "punch line" about Israel being God's own possession from its place at Babel, or Mt. Sinai, to the introduction of the covenant of circumcision, in keeping with his repeated assertion that the patriarchs already kept the Torah which was later revealed to Moses.¹² Even if the author of *Jubilees*' dependence on the full Angelic Patron Legend, as attested in Targum Ps.-Jon., PRE 24

¹¹ Translation cited from VanderKam (trs.), *Jubilees*.

¹² A similar use and re-application of the legend appears in the *Ps.-Clementines* (Recognitiones II,42; Homiliae XVIII,4).

and *Test. Naph.* 8-10, is doubted, there is no doubt about his agreement with Deut 32:8-9 and Sir. 17:17, and his belief in the general concept of angelic guardians appointed over the nations.

In all probability, the *Book of Jubilees* dates from the Maccabean crisis.¹³ Two other texts from the same tumultuous period also attest the belief that angelic guardians are set over the nations, the Book of Daniel and the Enochic *Animal Apocalypse*. In the former the angelic patrons of Persia (10:13, 20), of Greece (10:20) and of Israel (10:21, 12:1) are all mentioned. The fourth and final revelation (chaps. 10-12) opens with an extended introduction in which a description of the unnamed angel sent to Daniel is given in some detail (10:5-6). This angel, who should probably be identified with the archangel Gabriel,¹⁴ informs Daniel that his mission was opposed by "the Prince of the Kingdom of Persia" (שר (מלכות פרס)). Michael, one of the chief princes (אחד השרים הראשנים), came to the unnamed angel's (or Gabriel's) aid and allowed him to complete his mission of revelation to Daniel (10:12-14). He informs Daniel that when he has completed his mission, he will return to fight against the Prince of Persia and, after him, the Prince of Greece (10:20). In the apocalyptic assumption that earthly realities reflect and mirror heavenly ones, the princes of Persia and Greece, that is, their angelic patrons, oppose the archangels who stand up for Israel. And their order, Persia followed by Greece, parallels the events of terrestrial history: The dominion of the Persian Empire was brought to an end by Alexander the Great and his successors (cf. Dan. 8). Here is the same basic concept of Deut 32:8-9; Sir. 17:17 and *Jub.* 15:31-32, with the one significant development that now Israel also has an angelic patron: Michael (10:21; cf. also 12:1). We will return to this development momentarily.

First, however, we must examine the other Maccabean era text, the *Animal Apocalypse*. This symbolic retelling of the history of Israel, in which humans are represented by various species of animals and heavenly beings are represented as humans, extends from the creation of Adam through to the Maccabean crisis from which issues the end of the present age and the inauguration of the age to come. The patriarchs and Israel are invariably represented by *kosher* animals (e.g., sheep, bulls, cattle, etc.) and Gentile nations by wild beasts and various spe-

13 Cf. e.g., VanderKam, *Studies* 214-285; Nickelsburg, *Literature* 78-79; Schürer, *History*, III.1.311-313.

14 Gabriel was the angel of revelation in the two previous visions (8:16; 9:21) and the activity ascribed to this figure (11:1) corresponds to the date of Gabriel's activity (9:1-3, 21-23). So also Collins, *Daniel* 373, 376.

cies of unclean animals. The author presents the period extending from the Babylonian captivity to the Maccabean triumph as a period in which the Lord of the Sheep (i.e., God) hands over the sheep (i.e., Israel) to the oversight of seventy Shepherds, that is, to seventy angels, which, of course, recalls the seventy angels of the Angelic Patron Legend. This period covers the Babylonian captivity (*1En.* 89:55-71), the limited restoration under Zerubbabel and Joshua (89:72-77), the Persian and Hellenistic hegemonies (90:1-7), and especially the crisis under the Seleucids which resulted in the Maccabean revolt (90:6-19). The seventy Shepherds, it would seem, represent the angelic patrons of the Gentile nations who oppress Israel during this period of some four centuries; in turning Israel over to the nations, God in effect turns them over to the nations' heavenly patrons. At the beginning of this period the Lord of the Sheep gives strict instructions to the Shepherds for their period of oversight: the order the Shepherds are to replace one another as Israel's "guardian," who among the sheep is to be punished and who killed. However, the Lord of the Sheep also appoints a certain angelic scribe to audit the activity of the Shepherds, because the Lord of the Sheep knows that the Shepherds will exceed their commission and kill more of the sheep than he had intended (89:59-64). As the narrative proceeds there are a number of clues that this angelic figure is probably to be identified with none other than the archangel Michael.¹⁵ However, that maybe, it is often noted that the event alluded to in *1En.* 90:13-14 is probably the same as that recorded in 2Macc 11:6-11, in which an angel comes to the aid of Judas Maccabeus and his forces.¹⁶ We will return to Michael in a moment. It needs first to be noted that the author of the *Animal Apocalypse* has taken the concept of the angelic guardians of the nations and stood it on its head, so to speak. Here the angelic patrons function not so much as guardians of the Gentile nations, although they are that to be sure, nor even as angels charged with leading the Gentiles astray, as in *Jubilees*. Rather, they function as a means of punishing Israel. Israel who has been under the protection of the Lord of the Sheep throughout its history was, at the exile, handed over to the nations. Here again we encounter the apocalyptic notion that earthly realities mirror and reflect heavenly ones.

15 At 90:22 this figure is identified as one of the seven white men, who represent the seven archangels, one of whom is clearly Michael (cf. *1En.* 87:2-89.1 with *1En.* 9-10). Moreover, at 90:13-14 this figure parallels the actions of Michael in Dan. 10:21 and esp. 12:1. So also, e.g., Charles, *Enoch* 201, 211; Uhlig, *Henochbuch* 694, 699. The identification is questioned by Tiller, *Apocalypse* 326.

16 Cf. Charles, *Enoch* 211; Tiller, *Apocalypse* 360-361.

3.2 Michael as Guardian of Israel

As already intimated, although there was a widespread view among the Jews that Israel, as a special possession of God Himself, had not been appointed an angelic guardian, this was not the only view current in the second temple period. Indeed, it would appear that it was becoming increasingly common to assert that the archangel Michael served as Israel's heavenly patron. As we have already seen, the unnamed angel (probably Gabriel) who appears to Daniel refers to Michael as "your (plu.) Prince" (שִׂרְכָּהּ 10:21). In addition, according to Daniel the eschatological crisis will culminate with the appearance of "Michael, the great Prince, the protector of your people" (lit. "Michael, the great Prince, the one who stands over the sons of your people"; מִיכָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַשֹּׁרֵה עַל בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ 12:1). Again, as mentioned above, there is good reason to suppose that the angelic scribe who records the actions of the seventy Shepherds in the *Animal Apocalypse* is Michael. This becomes especially clear at *1En.* 90:13-14 when this angelic figure takes up battle for the Maccabeans against the Seleucids, paralleling the actions of Michael in Daniel (10:21; 12:1). It is integral to the narrative strategy of the *Animal Apocalypse* that individuals, human or angelic, are never named. Other texts also mention an angelic patron set over Israel without naming him. These include the *Testament of Moses* (10:1), *2Maccabees* (3:24-28; 10:29-30; 11:6-11; 15:20-27; cf. also *3 Macc.* 6:18-19), and the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* (*TLevi* 5:1-6; *TDan.* 6:2-7). While it is not certain that these allude to Michael, such a supposition is not at all improbable. Two further texts, however, explicitly relate Michael to Israel. In *1 Enoch's* list of archangels (*1En.* 20:5), Michael is set over "the good ones of the people" (τοῦ λαοῦ).¹⁷ The nation of Israel is often referred to in the Septuagint as "the people" (ὁ λαός). And in the *War Scroll* Michael's position over "the gods" (i.e., the angels) parallels Israel's over "all flesh" (1QM xvii.6-8a).¹⁸ Indeed, commentators gener-

17 The Greek manuscript repeats the whole of 19:3-21:9 and so has this passage twice, first as Μιχαήλ ὁ εἰς τῶν ἁγίων ἀγγέλων ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν τοῦ λαοῦ ἀγαθῶν τεταγμένος καὶ ἐπὶ τῷ χάω, and then as Μιχαήλ ὁ εἰς τῶν ἁγίων ἀγγέλων ὃς ἐπὶ τῶν τοῦ λαοῦ ἀγαθῶν τέτακται καὶ ἐπὶ τῷ χάω. Both of which can be translated as "Michael, one of the holy angels who is set over the good ones of the people and over chaos." The final phrase, however, is odd and conflicts with *1En.* 20:2, according to which Uriel is set over "Tartarus." The reading of the Ethiopic, "Michael, one of the holy angels, for he has been put in charge of the good ones of humankind, in charge of the people," suggest that we may have here to do with a doublet which entered the textual tradition early and that the final phrase, in both the Greek and Ethiopic, should simply be omitted.

18 "He (i.e., God) sends everlasting aid to the lot of his covenant by the power of the majestic angel for the sway of Michael in everlasting light, to illumine with joy the

ally agree that Michael is none other than the Prince of Lights or Angel of His truth whom the Qumran community regarded as their special patron (IQS iii.13-iv.1).¹⁹ Since the covenanters of Qumran regarded themselves as the remnant of the people of Israel, it is not surprising that they also regarded the archangel set over the nation as their own heavenly protector and guardian.

3.3 Guardian Angels of Individuals

Belief in guardian angels appointed to individuals is attested somewhat less frequently in the Judaism of the second temple period. It would, however, be a mistake to conclude that it enjoyed less importance in the eyes of most Jews. By its very nature, it falls into the category of private piety rather than public religion and thus is bound to appear in public texts much less frequently. It is, nonetheless, to be found, in early texts, such as the books of Tobit and *Jubilees*, later in Philo of Alexandria and still later in two texts from the first half of the second century: Ps.-Philo's *Liber Aniquitatum Biblicarum* and 3 *Baruch*.

In the Book of Tobit, which is usually thought to date from the sometime between 225 BC and 175 BC,²⁰ the archangel Raphael functions as the guardian of Tobiah, Tobit's son. He guides and guards him on his journey to Media (chaps. 5-11), instructs him on how to protect himself and free his bride, Sarah, from the demon Asmodeus and on how to cure his father's blindness (6:5-9, 17-18; 11:7-8). To be sure, throughout most of the tale one has the impression that Raphael is not a guardian angel in the usual sense of an angel who has been assigned to Tobiah from his birth and will accompany him throughout his life. Rather, Raphael's mission has all the hallmarks of an occasional assignment in response to Tobit's and Sarah's prayers (3:16-17). After all, Raphael is one of the seven archangels who stand in the presence of God himself (12:15). However, when Raphael reveals his identity to Tobit and Tobiah at the story's end, he divulges that he has had more than a passing interest in Tobit and Tobiah, he has delivered their

covenant of Israel, peace and blessing to God's lot, to exalt the sway of Michael above all the gods, and the dominion of Israel over all flesh" (ישלח עזר עולמים לגורל) (ב[ריתו בגבורת מלאך האדיר למשרת מיכאל באור עולמים להאיר בשמחה ברית ישראל שלום (וברכה לגורל אל להרים באילם משרת מיכאל לממשלת ישראל בכול בשר). Text and translation from García Martínez / Tigchelaar, Dead Sea I.140-141.

19 For discussion and bibliography see, Hannah, Michael 64-75.

20 So Fitzmyer, Tobit 50-52.

prayers to God, witnessed Tobit's acts of piety and even tested Tobit with blindness (12:12-14). It would seem, then, that Raphael had indeed been appointed as the guardian angel of Tobit, Tobiah and even Sarah long before the events recorded in the Book of Tobit. Given this lack of clarity, it is possible that the Book of Tobit attests a rather undeveloped form of the belief in guardian angels of individuals, at least when compared to later works like *3 Baruch* and *LAB*. Nonetheless, it demonstrates that the concept was not unknown in Judaism, well before these second century texts.

A similar situation may be reflected in the *Book of Jubilees*. In a passage which has no parallel in Genesis, Rebecca, before her death, shares her fears with Isaac that after they are no more, Easu will take his revenge on Jacob. Isaac remains confident of Jacob's safety, for even

if [Easu] wishes to kill his brother Jacob, he will be handed over to Jacob and will not escape from his control but will fall into his control. Now you are not to be afraid for Jacob, because Jacob's guardian is greater and more powerful, glorious, and praiseworthy than Esau's guardian" (35:16-17).

R. H. Charles regarded this as "the earliest distinct reference to [the] belief" in "the idea of men's guardian angels."²¹ If Tobit is discounted, Charles may well be right with regard to guardian angels of individuals in Jewish literature (which was doubtless his intention). Again, as with Tobit, we encounter here no confession of a belief that humans, in general, possess heavenly guardians, as in Mesopotamian and Hellenistic literature, nor even that all faithful Jews have such protectors as seems implied in *LAB* and *3 Baruch*. It would be easy to take the guardians of *Jubilees* 35:17 as if they were unique to important figures in the life of the nation like Jacob and Easu. However that may be, it is striking that the author of *Jubilees*, for all his interest in angels of various classes, only mentions guardian angels this once.

As mentioned above, Philo of Alexandria, a Platonist and an interpreter of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, could accommodate a belief in guardian angels. Philo's angelology is fundamentally derivative from Platonic demonology, but also draws in a more superficial way from Jewish traditions concerning angels.²² One of the fundamental principles of Philo's angelology is the conviction that angels serve God as ministers on behalf of humanity (*Somn.* I,141-142; *LA* III,177-178; *Gig.* 12). Philo is usually very general in his comments regarding this ministry on behalf of humanity: God employs angels "as ministers and helpers, to have charge and care of mortal man" (*Gig.* 12),

21 Charles, *Jubilees* 209, n. 17.

22 Cf. Dillon, *Philo's Doctrine* and Hannah, Michael 76-90.

as agents of healing (*LA* III,177-178), and as messengers and mediators (*Somn.* I,141-142). On one occasion, however, Philo makes it clear that individual angels also serve to as guardians of individuals, assigned at one's birth. A demon or evil angel is also assigned at one's birth (*QE* I,23). In other words, every individual is appointed two guardians at birth, one good, the other evil. This variation re-appears in early Christianity (*Hermas*, *Man.* VI,2) and rabbinic Judaism (*b.Shabb.* 119b). In Philo, then, we meet albeit briefly a clear belief in guardian angels of individuals. Does Philo owe this to his reading of Plato and other works of Hellenistic philosophy alone or had hints found in *Tobit* and *Jubilees* already developed within Judaism into the full blown concept? Certainly by Philo's time Judaism and Hellenism had been in contact for over three centuries and the former had been greatly influenced by the latter. Even if Philo's one reference to guardian angels of individuals, and his angelology generally, seems more Platonic than Biblical, it would be overly critical to suppose that Philo was the only Jew who adopted a belief in guardian angels, especially given the moves already made by *Tobit* and *Jubilees*.

By the first half of the second century of our era, the idea that individuals were assigned angelic guardians must have been widespread in Judaism. This belief is assumed in two very different documents, a retelling of the history of Israel replete with midrashic traditions, Ps.-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, and an apocalypse of the other worldly journey type, *3 Baruch*. The later is probably in origin a Jewish text, but in its present form has certainly been revised by Christians, among whom alone it has survived.²³ The Christian additions, however, are easily identified and do not concern us here. The text recounts a heavenly journey by the Old Testament scribe Baruch through the seven heavens led by an *angelus interpretis*. In the fifth heaven Baruch witnesses the descent of Michael, presumably from the sixth or seventh heaven, to receive the prayers (so the Slavonic version) or the prayers, good deeds or virtues (so the Greek version) of humanity (*3Bar.* 11-16). The "angels who are in the service of men"²⁴ appear before Michael

23 So, e.g., Harlow, *Apocalypse* 77-108; Hughes, *3 Baruch* 528-530. The date of *3 Baruch* is uncertain, but as Origen (*Princ.* II,3.6) cites it, it must be earlier than AD 231. The heavenly cult described in chaps. 11-16 and the lack of concern for the temple of Jerusalem fits comfortably with the situation in Judaism after the two Jewish revolts when all hope in a restored Jerusalem temple had been completely abandoned.

24 So the Slavonic. The Greek version reads "the angels over the authorities" (ἄγγελοι ἐπὶ τῶν ἐξουσιῶν). Hughes (*3 Baruch* 540, n.), following Ryssel, supposed that ἐξουσιῶν was an error for δικαίων ("righteous"), but this was on the basis of, presumably inferior, witnesses to the Slavonic version. Better Slavonic manuscripts, followed by Gaylord

(12:3) to deliver the prayers (or prayers, good deeds and virtues). Three different groups of these angels approach Michael: Those whose bowls are full, those whose bowls are only half full and those whose bowls are empty. The first have been appointed to pious and virtuous individuals, the second serve men who are less dedicated but for whom there is hope, and the last to "evil men."²⁵ This last group begs to be released from their charges. Michael ascends, presumably to the seventh heaven, to offer the prayers (or prayers, good deeds and virtues) to God. After a time he returns and commands the first two groups of angels to deliver to their charges mercy (so the Slavonic) or oil (so the Greek), in due measure according to their deeds, prayers, virtues, etc. To the third group, he relates the divine command that they are not to leave those to whom they have been committed, but to bring God's punishment on them. Here, in a Jewish text, is a fully developed portrait of guardian angels, appointed apparently to every individual person, responsible for their protection, their growth in piety and retribution for their sins. The picture is one which will re-appear, in a very similar form, in a Christian context (cf. *Apoc. Paul*; see below).

The picture is nowhere so complete in Ps.-Philo,²⁶ but then the purpose of the author is completely different. Ps.-Philo only alludes to guardian angels on three occasions and does not attempt the kind of depiction which we find in *3Bar.* 11-16. At *LAB* 15:5, which records the apostasy occasioned by the report of the Twelve spies (Num. 13), it is related that:

...suddenly the glory of God appeared, and he said to Moses, "So, do the people continue not to listen to me at all? Behold now the plan of action that has issued from me will not be in vain. I will send the angel of my wrath upon them to afflict their bodies with fire in the wilderness. But I will command my angels who watch over them (*angelis meis qui custodiunt eos*) not to intercede for them; for their souls I will shut up in the chambers of darkness,"²⁷

It is implied that certain of the angels have been appointed to keep watch over or guard the Israelites and to intercede for them. Later, near the end of the work, in the account of Samuel anointing David king, the young David composes a hymn of praise, which includes "...because

in his edition, speak not of "righteous men" but of "the service of men." In any case, the Greek does not agree with the context and should be regarded as corrupt.

25 So the Greek. The Slavonic reads "to places of demons and men," which cannot be correct.

26 For *LAB*'s composition in the first half of the second century, see the very full discussion in Jacobson, Pseudo-Philo 199-210.

27 I cite the translation of Harrington, Pseudo-Philo.

God has protected me and because he has delivered me to his angels and to his guardians that they should guard me" (59:4). David, as King of Israel, is protected by a host of angels and guardians. And finally, Ps.-Philo's version of the Decalogue includes "You shall not be a false witness against your neighbour, speaking false testimony, lest your guardians speak false testimony against you" (11:12). Howard Jacobson objects that this is a nonsensical statement:

LAB could not have written that as a punishment for your crimes, your guardian angels would testify falsely against you. It is one thing to say that they would fail to plead upon your behalf or would even testify against you (cf. 15:5), but quite another – and entirely unacceptable – to say that the angels would lie in their testimony against you. The text needs correction.²⁸

Jacobson goes on to suggest that the original Hebrew, behind the Latin text, read שכניך ("your neighbour"), but this "was corrupted to – or confused for – שמריך" ("your guardian").²⁹ While this is not impossible, there are certain difficulties with this suggestion. First, the Hebrew term for neighbour in the Decalogue is not שכן, but רע (Exod. 20:16, 17; Deut 5:20, 21). Second, מר- would not seem to be an obvious mistake for כנ-. Third, even Jacobson admits that guardian angels was a concept of some importance for Ps.-Philo. To be sure the text is difficult, but it does not necessarily follow that the text is corrupt. We *could* have here an example of hyperbole: "If you are a false witness, even those who cannot be false, your guardians, will turn against you." On the other hand, it maybe that the text originally warned that the guardians of those who give false witness will testify against them and "false" was added in error by a scribe who incorrectly understood the text – a scribal correction which could have occurred at the Hebrew, Greek or Latin stage of transmission. Either way, given Ps.-Philo's interest in guardian angels it is hazardous to read them out of this passage. If this is accepted, then we have in this, LAB's first reference to guardian angels of individuals, a clear parallel to 3Bar. 11-16: Guardian angels function not only to protect and intercede for the humans to whom they are assigned, but also to testify against them if their deeds are evil.

From all the above it would seem that a belief in guardian angels of individuals was common among Jews by the second century at the latest. While we cannot cite as many examples for it as we can for angelic guardians of nations, this does not mean that it was not as wide

²⁸ Jacobson, *Pseudo-Philo*, 475.

²⁹ Jacobson, *Pseudo-Philo*, 476.

spread. Its character as an expression of popular religion can easily account for its relative paucity. The early Christian evidence, to which we now turn, serves to confirm this conclusion.³⁰

4. Early Christianity

4.1 Guardians of the Nations

Christian authors from time to time briefly mention angelic guardians of the nations, often, but not always, with reference to Deut 32:8-9 LXX. For example, Clement of Alexandria, after asserting that “divine ministers” (τῶν θείων λειτουργῶν) are one of God’s particular means of instilling virtuous thoughts in righteous individuals, adds as an aside, “[f]or the patronage of angels is distributed over the nations and cities. And, perhaps, some (angels) are even assigned to individuals” (Stromata VI,17.157.5 [GCS 2,513]).³¹ Hippolytus, in his *Contra Gaius*, appeals to Deut 32:8 in his defense of the Johannine Apocalypse. Gaius had apparently set various passages in the gospels and in Paul over against texts from the Revelation in order to challenge the canonicity and apostolicity of the latter. In contrast to Rev. 9:14-15, Gaius pointed out that Jesus had predicted that nation would rise against nation, not that angels would fight against humans as Revelation seems to imply. Hippolytus, with real insight into the apocalyptic method, however, asserted that the four angels which John mentions in Rev. 9:14-15 referred to the angelic guardians of nations – in his opinion, the angels over the Persians, Medes, Babylonians and Assyrians.³² The influence of Deut 32:8-9 can also be detected in the *Ps.-Clementines* (Recognitiones II,42; Homiliae XVIII,4).

30 One other text, from the *Epistle of Enoch*, should probably be mentioned, for the sake of completeness: “He will set a guard of the holy angels over all the righteous and holy; and they will be kept as the apple of the eye, until (Eth.: all) evil and (Eth.: all) sin come to an end” (1En. 100:5). However, the context makes clear that this concerns the post-mortem, intermediate state of the souls of the righteous and not their earthly existence.

31 Κατὰ τε γὰρ τὰ ἔθνη καὶ πόλεις νενέμηνται τῶν ἀγγέλων αἱ προστασίαι, τάχα δὲ καὶ ὧν ἐπὶ μέρους [ὧν] ἐνίοις ἀποτετάχεται τινες.

The word in the square brackets, ὧν, is not in the manuscripts but has been added by various editors. It has been suggested that ἀνθρώπων should be added instead of ὧν. This would be clearer but does not change the sense. The translation is my own.

32 This Hippolytan work of lost. Portions of it, however, are cited by the twelfth century Dionysius Bar Salibi in his commentary on the New Testament. See Gwynn, Hippolytus 402 and Achelis, *Hippolyt's*, 239-247.

As just intimated, Hippolytus was surely on the right track when he identified the four angels bound at the Euphrates river as four guardian angels of four eastern nations, for it is a move which accords with the important assumption of apocalypticism that earthly events and happenings mirror heavenly ones. Whether or not John of Patmos actually here intended angelic national guardians is another question, especially given the demonic nature of the forces which these four angels unleash (Rev. 9:16-19).³³ Nonetheless, it is all but certain that John was familiar with and accepted the concept of angelic guardians of the nations. For he clearly knew and was influenced by the Book of Daniel in general, and the portrait of Michael in Dan. 10:13, 20-21 and 12:1 has informed his depiction of Michael in Rev. 12:7 in particular. Moreover, the angels of the seven churches of Asia are probably best construed as a variation on this same theme.³⁴ The concept of certain angels appointed as national patrons is thus attested in a text from the end of the first century (Revelation), in an author from the end of the second (Clement), another from the beginning of the third (Hippolytus) and from two related fourth century works (the *Ps.-Clementines*).

4.2 Guardian Angels of Individuals

The notion that angels were assigned to individuals is also found in early Christianity, as the passage cited above from Clement of Alexandria illustrates. Clement was by no means the first Christian author to express such an opinion. The concept is to be found at least once in the New Testament, although other passages are often cited in support of the doctrine. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, for example, expresses the general idea, in a manner reminiscent of Philo (*Gig.* 12), that angels serve as ministers on behalf of humanity (1:14). This in itself need not imply guardian angels, but it is nevertheless a short step from this general assumption to the more specific conception of angels appointed to guide and protect individual humans. The variant reading at Luke 22:43 concerning the angel which appeared to Jesus on the Mount of Olives could be understood as his guardian,³⁵ as could the more than

33 Aune, *Revelation* II.538 and Beale, *Book 507*, however, think it possible that guardians of the nations were intended by John.

34 This was an early interpretation, found in, e.g., Hippolytus, *Antichristus* LIX; Origen, *De principiis* I,8.1; In *Lucam homiliae* XXIII,7; Basil, *Commentarii in Isaiaem* I,46, as well as in modern commentators, e.g., Caird, *Revelation* 24.

35 The passage is found in early witnesses from a variety of text-types: Western: D Ψ 0171 Lat Syr^c; Alexandrian: N^a*² L Copt^Bopt; Caesarean: Θ f¹ and Eusebius and Byzantine: E F G H Q D*. It is also supported by the Syr^{p,h} and in the early Fathers Justin,

twelve legions of angels which the Matthean Jesus, at his arrest, claims the right to call on (Matt. 26:53). In addition, Luke may have viewed the angel who appeared to Paul before the shipwreck on Malta (Acts 27:23-24) to be Paul's guardian. On the other hand, all of these texts may only express the general idea that angels serve humanity, especially Christians and, above all, the Son of God himself.

The New Testament text which without question alludes to guardian angels of individuals is a dominical saying recorded only in the Gospel of Matthew (18:10). Between a group of sayings taken over from Mark (18:1-5 [par. Mark 9:33-37] and 18:6-9 [par. Mark 9:42-47]), and the parable of the Lost Sheep taken over from Q material (18:12-14 [par. Luke 15:3-7]), Matthew inserts this saying which serves to join the two blocks of material together:

See to it that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I say to you that their angels in heaven always behold the Face of my Father who is in heaven.³⁶

The phrase "one of these little ones" is also found in parallel statements in v.6 and 14, and links all the three statements. Given the fuller form in v.6, "one of these little ones who believe in me," it is clear that believers, not children, are in view. It is hard to resist the conclusion that in Matthew's mind all believers were assigned an angel who stood in the presence of God, for neither the statement in verse 6 nor the one in verse 14 is limited to a sub-set of Christian believers. These guardians angels are probably to be equated with the large number of angelic hosts who stand before God (Dan. 7:10; *1En.* 40:1), and not with the four (*1En.* 40:2) or seven archangels (Tobit 12:15; Luke 1:19; *Test. Abr.* 7:11; cf. also Rev. 8:2; 4Q400 1 i.3-4) who stand in his immediate presence. To be sure, the picture here differs from that in *3Bar.* 11-16. According to Matthew's Jesus, the guardian angels perpetually stand before God, apparently interceding for their charges, rather than traveling back and forth between earth and heaven. This difference, however, belongs to the manner in which the angels are thought to fulfill their task or, at least, the manner in which the task is depicted. The task itself remains the same.

Irenaeus and Hippolytus. The passage is omitted by early and important witnesses, including P⁷⁵ א¹ A B N T W 579 it¹ Syr^s Copt^{Sa, Bopt} and moved to after Matt. 26.39 by A³ and manuscripts known to Jerome. The longer text is unlikely to have been original, but is clearly ancient.

36 Ὁρᾶτε μὴ καταρσινῆσητε ἑνὸς τῶν μικρῶν τούτων· λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτῶν ἐν οὐρανοῖς διὰ παντὸς βλέπουσι τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς. Under the influence of 18.6, the Western text (D it Vg^{mss} Syr^c) and some mss of the Sahidic Coptic include the addition τῶν πιστευόντων εἰς ἐμέ after the initial phrase. This reading, while not original, captures Matthew's intention.

Another New Testament passage, which is often thought to refer to guardian angels is Acts 12:15. Peter after his nocturnal and miraculous escape from prison goes to the house in Jerusalem where the church is gathered together to pray for his release. A servant girl, upon recognising his voice, neglects to let him in, but rushes into the house to inform the believers that the man they are praying for stands outside in the street. When she continues to insist, despite their incredulity, that it is so, they conclude that this must be his angel.³⁷ This is often taken to mean Peter's guardian angel³⁸ and a late rabbinic text (*GenR* 78:3) is appealed to which asserts that the angel with which Jacob wrestled (*Gen* 32:24-33) was none other than Esau's guardian, and that this explains Jacob's statement that to see Esau was like seeing the face of God (*Gen* 33:10). In other words, Esau's guardian looked like Esau; the two possessed the same appearance. However, in the story in Acts 12, Rhoda the servant girl does not see Peter's face, she merely hears his voice! It has recently been cogently argued that "angel" here refers to Peter himself in his intermediate state, i.e., Peter's post-mortem soul or spirit.³⁹ The frequent comparison of post-mortem existence with angelic existence (*1En.* 39:5; 45:4-5; 51:4; 54:1-2; 104:4; *2Bar.* 51:1-12; *Mark* 12:25 pars.) means that this explanation demands, at the very least, consideration. It is, I believe, confirmed when coupled with Acts 23:8-9. Given that the Sadducees, accepted the authority of the Hebrew Bible, even if a smaller canon than the Pharisees, it is impossible that they denied the existence of angels. Thus, Acts 23:8 must mean something like "The Sadducees deny the resurrection, as well as (post-mortem existence as) an angel or a spirit" – shorthand for the intermediate state – "but Pharisees acknowledge both (i.e., both resurrection and the intermediate state)."⁴⁰ Thus, in the New Testament, guardian angels of individuals are attested only once with certainty, *Matt.* 18:10, although they may be implied elsewhere.

Belief in guardian angels continued and grew in early Christianity. *Hermas'* Shepherd, who teaches him about repentance and holiness, and guides the composition of his book, is none other than his guardian angel (*Vis.* V,1-4). *Hermas* also repeats *Philo's* observation that two angels, one good and one evil, are assigned to humans (*Man.* VI,2). As already noted, *Clement of Alexandria* mentions the possibility that angels may be appointed to individual believers as guardians (*Stromata* VI,17.157.5). His uncertainty is not shared by later Fathers. *Origen*

37 ὁ ἄγγελός ἐστιν αὐτοῦ.

38 So e.g., Barrett, *Acts* I 585.

39 So Daube, *Acts* 23; cf. also Viviano / Taylor, Sadducees.

40 So also Daube, *Acts* 23.

(De principiis I,8.1), Jerome (Commentarii in Matthaëum XVIII), Basil the Great (Homiliae de Psalmis XXXIII,5), and John Chrysostom (Homiliae de Colossenses 3), among others, all held that individual believers were assigned angelic guardians. Guardian angels are also to be found in Christian apocrypha, including *Test. Jacob* 2:5; *Test. Adam* 4:1; *Test. Sol.*⁴¹ and *Apoc. Paul* 7-10. The latter, a third or fourth century composition,⁴² is especially significant for it offers a striking parallel to *3Bar.* 11-16: Every day, when all the angels gather to praise God, “the angel of...every man and woman, who protects and preserves them,” also appear in order to report the deeds of every person, “whether good or evil” (chapt. 7). Two groups of guardian angels are mentioned, those whose charges are righteous and holy, and those whose charges are sinners. The two depictions in the *Apoc. Paul* 7-10 and in *3Bar.* 11-16 are so similar that comparison of the two immediately raises suspicions of literary dependency or, more probably, of dependence on a common source or, at the very least, independent use of a common tops. However that may be, it is clear that early Christians adopted, with very little variation, Jewish conceptions regarding guardian angels.

5. Rabbinic Judaism

Space constraints mean that only a few rabbinic texts and traditions can be mentioned here. All the same, two or three will be sufficient to illustrate the fact that the Sages took over both angelic guardians of the nations and guardian angels of individuals, and developed them according to their own concerns and their methods of exegesis. For example, according to *ExodR* 32:3, R. Levi explained YHWH’s promise to send an angel before the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings (*Exod.* 23:20-21) and Moses’ objection that God Himself should lead them (*Exod.* 33:15) with the observation that, until the death of Moses, Israel was exempt from being appointed angelic patron. Then after Moses’ demise, even Israel was handed over to an angelic patron. R.

41 All three of these “testaments” are best regarded as Christian productions and not merely as Jewish compositions taken over and preserved by Christians. Of course, examples of the latter category, including *3 Baruch* and the *Testament of Levi*, also served to reinforce Christian belief in guardian angels, for they were preserved and read by Christians.

42 Keith Elliot argues that the original version dates from the mid-third century, for it appears to have been known to Origen (*Hom. on Ps.* 36), but only later recensions are now in existence. See Elliot, *New Testament* 616-617.

Levi appeals to the appearance of the mysterious angelic commander of the army of the LORD to Joshua, recorded in Jos. 5:13-15, as the moment when Israel's patron took up his office. A related tradition (*ExodR* 32:7) holds that Israel was transferred from YHWH to an angelic patron because of the apostasy of the golden calf (Exod. 32). *Exodus Rabbah* is a late text and the attribution to R. Levi, a Tanna of the fifth generation, is probably not to be trusted. Nonetheless, given that the assumptions of these traditions are to be found in the Hebrew Bible itself (Deut 32:8-9; Dan. 10:13, 20-21), it would not be surprising if these traditions are much older than their appearance in *ExodR* 32.

The belief in guardian angels of individuals during the Tannaitic period is much more secure. For example, a baraita in *b.Ta'an.* 11a asserts that whenever a Jew separates himself from Israel because of persecution, "the two ministering angels who accompany every man come and place their hands upon his head and say, 'So-and-so who separated himself from the community shall not behold the consolation of the community.'" ⁴³ From R. Jose b. R. Judah, a fourth generation Tanna we learn that one of these two ministering angels is good, the other evil, a tradition which we have already encountered in Philo (*QE* I,23) and Hermas (*Man.* VI,2). According to R. Jose, when these two angels accompany a Jew home on the eve of the Sabbath, if they find every thing in order and the table set for the Sabbath meal, the good angel pronounces, "May it be even thus on another Sabbath [too]." To which the evil angel must respond, "Amen." On the other hand, if they do not find everything in order and the table not set, then the evil angel pronounces, "May it be even thus on another Sabbath [too]." To which the good angel must respond, "Amen" (*b.Shabb.* 119b). Further examples from the Talmudim and Midrashim could be multiplied. It is clear that the Rabbis inherited a doctrine of heavenly guardians, both national and personal, from traditions current in the second temple period.

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